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ABSTRACT

The ideas of Randall J. Ryder (see related document) regarding secondary content area reading programs may be supplemented with other suggestions about teacher training and staff development. Among the suggestions are the following: content area teachers should be helped to use reading materials near students' reading levels. The certification process for reading personnel can be strengthened by demands on colleges and universities to be more consistent in course content and quality. Elementary and secondary content area teachers should communicate regularly and share techniques for reading instruction. There should be district commitment to content area reading instruction, and teacher training programs could be implemented in each school by a building-level reading coordinator assisted by an advisory group. Additional state or federal funding would be necessary for such a program. In the planning and development of content area reading programs, a needs assessment should be performed; the staff development program should include administrators, begin with formal training sessions, and move from large group participation to departmental involvement; there should be incentives for teachers to participate; building-level leadership should be used whenever possible; and a program of maintenance should be planned. (GW)

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PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS ON SECONDARY SCHOOL CONTENT AREA READING PROGRAMS

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The purpose of this presentation is to introduce a practitioner's reaction to Mr. Ryder's thoughts and analysis as well as suggestions on the subject of content area reading programs.

First let me comment on a couple of the proposed classroom techniques for content area instruction. The guided reading or structured reading lessons are excellent and I often recommend the same. However, in many of our secondary schools there exists a profile of reading skills so greatly diversified that using a single set of materials can be frustrating for students and teacher. Therefore, it is often necessary to direct content area teachers toward supplemental materials for the low ability students. This subject could be expanded on by further discussion of grouping for instruction, programmed materials, or differentiated lessons. But, the point is that content area teachers, in many cases need and should be encouraged to use reading materials as near the students' instructional-independent reading level as possible.

Second, Mr. Ryder also spoke of reading teachers assisting content area teachers with curriculum modification. This approach, although a difficult situation to create,is perhaps one of the healthiest steps and advanced stages of content area reading instruction. I have witnessed this stage, which followed a thorough training program. The results of this format for curriculum development are rewarding for both teachers and students. For those approaching or involved in a content area reading project, let this stage be a good one.

I have my own opinion of how to establish a total secondary reading program with content area reading instruction as a key component. I do

agree with Mr. Ryder that staff development is crucial for successful content area reading instruction. My reaction will be directed primarily at the staff development aspects. The reaction will occasionally be in harmony with the university-oriented proposal but will introduce other options and considerations. This reaction will be based on the limitations and realities existing in our learning institutions. Some limitations are: (1) personnel, (2) recognition of need, (3) monies, (4) organization, (5) other day to day encounters that are so visible in our schools today.

Mr. Ryder spoke of certification. On the subject of certification of reading personnel, there is little argument from this teacher that specific reading credentials should be necessary and ultimately required for all reading positions. However, the certification process itself can be strengthened by demands on colleges and universities to be more consistent with the content and strength of their courses. Too often the reading certification procedure within a particular state and among higher learning institutions has continuity only to the limits of course titles and the number of required quarter or equivalent semester credits. The argument at this point is not with the proposed model. However, the challenge is directed at the constraints of the existing certification process, or lack of continuity.

Clearly, the need for the direct instruction of the reading skills that Mr. Ryder has outlined in the content areas of our secondary schools is necessary. This is no longer a heavily debated issue among educators, particularly in the area of reading. One should also recognize the necessity for continued application of this process at the elementary

levels, with particular emphasis within intermediate content area curricula. Although this symposium is directed at secondary school reading instruction, it is still necessary to mention that the task exists at both the elementary and secondary levels and inter-communication must exist as Mr. Ryder pointed out.

Elementary content area reading instruction continues to have a bearing on this discussion in that a complete secondary staff development program should have feeder school staff and curriculum participation. This is not to suggest that the feeder school faculties should be a part of a significant percentage of secondary in-service or workshop sessions, but there is an organizational need for the secondary content area teachers to understand what content area reading skills are being taught or should be taught at the intermediate grades. It is practical, appropriate and necessary for elementary-secondary articulation to involve the identification of what reading and study skills are introduced and when they are to be mastered. Mr. Ryder referenced a scope and sequence of content area reading skills; this scope and sequence should be K - 12.

The format for elementary participation in a staff development program can be shaped from any number of basic designs. Perhaps the most simplistic formula would be to invite an elementary curriculum expert to outline and explain the existing scope and sequence of reading and study skill instruction at the elementary level. The elementary scope and sequence synopsis should be followed by further explanation and a sharing of instructional techniques by an appropriate delegation of teachers from the "nearby" feeder schools.

The secondary teachers should be afforded the same opportunity to identify and share existing curriculum components and approaches to content area reading instruction. The primary objective is to produce a stronger understanding and identification of content area reading instruction and a greater communication between the two traditionally well-separated disciplines of elementary and secondary education. The students will ultimately profit from a more complete and organized system of instruction.

On the subject of a delivery system for a staff development program there is little doubt that there must be district commitment to content area reading instruction. This commitment must be generated in the form of authority and adequate budget for a district reading director. The district reading directorship which Mr. Ryder also mentioned should be an administrative position held by a person with strong leadership qualities and a complete understanding of the learning-to-read process. The director should have direct influence over the maintenance system of the district's entire reading effort including staff development.

Because of economic reasons as well as effectiveness, the training of teachers to expand or initiate new reading instruction in the content subjects should move as quickly as possible from the district director to the building level. Under my proposed plan, the responsibility for organizing the training program should fall on the shoulders of a certificated building-level reading coordinator. The coordinator should be assisted by an advisory group. The vehicle for the advisory group can be an existing faculty council. Principals should be encouraged to create these building coordinators from existing building budgets and

staff allocations. As an incentive each principal would receive 1/2 of a teacher-position reimbursement from district central service and dispatched by the reading director. This 1/2 position reimbursement would be used by the building principal to assist with the creation of the building reading coordinator.

Admittedly, these are difficult times for school systems to reach into existing coffers and generate extra monies for projects such as the one-half position reimbursement program. Therefore, additional state or federal funding is necessary for such a program. A formula to consider would be 1/2 state reimbursement for building-level reading coordinators such as the formula which Minnesota presently uses for special education teachers. This speaker is convinced that without a full time building reading coordinator a total reading program (involving direct remedial and developmental reading instruction and staff development) is usually impossible to initiate and maintain with complete success.

Under this plan building reading coordinators would be utilized in a number of ways. Depending on faculty needs, student needs, building size and budgetary limitations the building reading coordinators would function in a variety of roles. Although the activities would differ, the coordinators' basic goal would be the development of a total secondary school reading program. A flexible, yet identifiable, job description would be created by state boards of education to outline the appropriate use of reading coordinators.

On the subject of a staff development format which Mr. Ryder alluded to earlier, there is no specific formula that can be identified

and used consistently among schools with guaranteed success. Different schools have differing faculties and differing student needs. There are procedures that schools pursuing a staff development program directed at encouraging reading instruction in secondary content subjects should recognize. Let us continue to look at some of the concerns administrators and building reading coordinators should have as a content area reading program is created or strengthened.

In planning a staff development program at the building level it is undoubtedly necessary for the coordinator to do a thorough needs assessment of student and staff and curriculum needs. At minimum, the entire student population should be tested for reading comprehension and vocabulary levels if this information is not already available. A profile of the building reading skills should be developed. Early in the staff development program, content area teachers, perhaps on a departmental basis, should design and administer teacher-prepared tests which assess the degree of compatibility between existing printed curriculum and individual student reading skills.

A needs assessment of the faculty involved is something that cannot be dealt with casually. The previous presenter's approach suggests some excellent concerns as staff needs are being identified. However unless absolutely necessary or dictated by standard operating procedures of specific schools I believe I would avoid creating a separate committee for reading. As a result of a total needs assessment (student, staff and curriculum) and early project activities, teachers and staff should

begin to feel faculty influence on the development of the training program. This feeling of faculty ownership of the project is imperative and should continue to grow in strength.

The staff development program, in most cases, should begin with formal training sessions and involve all certificated staff, including administrators. A program without administrative commitment and participation can quickly lose momentum. Non-certificated staff (teacher aides) should also be involved in the formal training sessions, although it would certainly be appropriate to design a separate training model,time and budget permitting. Formal secondary training sessions should be thorough, based on need, and should eventually break down into departmental efforts to support individual curriculum revision projects.

As to the intensity of the formal training and workshop components of a staff development program, the coordinator might begin looking at what 30-60 hours of large group and small group departmental training would accomplish. An outline of topics, a timeline, and general direction of the program, including an on-going evaluation design, must be created. This outline and a clear interpretation of the needs will be invaluable as funding is pursued. On the subject of funding and given district commitment, the district reading director should be an obvious resource. If the local budgets are thin, building programs should be directed to "title monies", state funds, or private grants for funding.

The training sessions would most likely be numerous, after school, weekends, or during appropriate recess periods. The formal training

should move from large group participation to departmental involvement. Classroom curriculum modification projects should be encouraged early in the staff development program.

On the subject of teacher participation in the training sessions, building coordinators must generate a participation incentive. The identification of the proper incentive formula should be a part of the needs assessment process. This incentive formula could follow any one or combination of formats, such as: stipend, hourly rate pay, professional growth credit, college extension credit, or some other measurable reward, unless a great deal of released time is available. It also should be realized that a meaningful, practical, on-target staff development program will also contribute towards a successful attendance pattern. It is well for coordinators to realize that unless attendance at the training or staff development activities is required, which is difficult to arrange, the likelihood of one hundred percent participation is slight.

As leadership personnel is selected for the appropriately identified in-service topics, coordinators should look first to the talent available at the building level. This approach makes sense economically, although all leadership personnel should be appropriately reimbursed for preparation and extended-time responsibilities. Building-level leadership, when properly selected, should also help contribute to greater faculty ownership in the program. Coordinators should be able to lead many of the training activities. Other building coordinators that are within a district could also be an excellent source of leadership. Local college and

university leadership should be tapped whenever possible and necessary. The amount of leadership necessary from outside a particular building or district will vary a great deal. This great variation in need is, of course, generated by a multiple of influencing conditions, such as: immediately available staff strengths, faculty needs, student needs, and budgetary restraints.

Once a faculty is satisfied that a content area reading program has received adequate stimulation, it is a matter of maintenance. A program of maintenance is a serious responsibility for the building reading coordinator. Additional funding should continue to be secured for activities such as: improved instructional materials, curriculum development projects in and among the departments, additional training activities, and dissemination activities for other schools in need of assistance.

A complete and successful secondary school content area reading program is accomplished only through a great deal of skillful planning. There are also other contributing factors; but many, if not all, are directly influenced by the availability of adequate monies for the program. It is therefore appropriate to conclude these comments on content area reading instruction with a request to school boards and administrators to adequately support the initiation and maintenance of quality reading programs.